

A MAN FIGHTS BEST IN HIS OWN TOWNSHIP.

BY ROBERT BARR,

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UNDER the hot sun Tom Stover rode which he offered his hand to the newcomer. slowly across the Texas plains towards the collection of shanties which he saw ahead of him, some miles away. He meditated deeply as he rode, for he was on the eve of a momentous enterprise. As he approached the group of buildings they resolved themselves into items; first, a long, low, wooden building that served at once for freight shed, telegraph office, and station house of Chapman's Junction; next to it on the east was a shanty with a stovepipe sticking through the board roof, where Peters, the station agent, lived. On the other side, near the track, were fenced-in enclosures, all whitewashed, with slatted, inclined planes up which the cattle traveled to be wedged side by side in the stock cars of the trains going East.

Tom tied his horse to the topmost rail of the whitewashed enclosure, and walked up the steps to the broad platform that surrounded the station building.

The station was on the south side of the straight track, the two converging steel rails of which, like lines without a turning drawn on the level plain of Texas, disappeared into the eastern horizon on the one hand and into the western horizon on the other. The overhanging eave of the northern side of the building threw a grateful shade upon the broad platform, and in that shade, upon a chair tilted back against the side of the house, his heels on the lower rungs of the chair, his back resting against the wall, sat a man with his broad-brimmed hat drawn over his eyes, apparently sound asleep. His slumber was guarded by the outstretched arms of the red signal boards: one to the east and one to the west of him, up and down the iron lines.

"Hallo, Peters!" shouted Stover. "You are a hard-worked laboring man."

Peters slowly shoved the brim of his slouched hat back from his brow and stared up at the interloper.

"Hallo, Tom!" was all he said; then he tilted his chair down on its four legs again, rose, and stretched himself, after

"Say, Peters, you haven't another chair about the place, have you? I want to sit down and have a talk with you."

"No," replied Peters. "There isn't another chair within ten miles, I guess, but there's a box in the telegraph office that'll do just as well; so you sit down in my chair and fire away. I've got something a mighty sight more practical than chairs, and that is a bottle of good Kentucky."

"Now, you're shouting," rejoined Tom with undisguised glee. "Some people might think it a little too hot for drinking whisky, but I can stand it if you can."

"Oh," said the station master, in a tone of authority, "that's one thing I like about whisky, it suits any climate."

Saying which, he dragged a square box out of the telegraph office and sat down upon it, after handing the bottle over to Tom, who took a pull, wiped the mouth of the bottle on his coat sleeve, and passed it solemnly back to the station master, who, echoing his sentiment, "Here's to you," turned the bottom of the flask toward the clear Texan sky. "Well," said Peters, setting the bottle down an equal distance between them, "I'm mighty glad you came in. I was getting a bit lonesome."

"I should think," said Tom, "that seeing you are station master and telegraph operator and switch tender and freight shover, all in one, you would have enough to do to keep you awake at least."

"Well, I haven't," said Peters. "You see, with about one train in twenty-four hours, for the night express doesn't count, there isn't much excitement around the junction; in fact, Chapman's Junction isn't even a junction, because the line they surveyed from here was never put through, on account of the panic coming on. And then the city those speculators staked out—well, there's some of the stakes left, and that's about all. No—there isn't much excitement round here."

"That's so," admitted Tom; "and for

my part, I'm goin' off where there's something goin' on."

"What do you mean?" cried Peters. "You're not going to leave us, are you?"

"Well, only for a little while. I'm going to take a trip. I'm going clean through to New York."

"You don't mean it!" cried Peters in amazement.

"Yes, I do. You see I've been steady to work on Chapman's ranch for more than five years. Now, Chapman, at the first, wasn't doing very well, and so we

"You bet he was!" cried Tom, enthusiastically. "So I told the old man I was going to take two or three weeks off and blow in some of that money, and I've just rode out to see you and find how much it costs to New York and back."

"You're not going to take all that money with you?" said Peters, warningly.

Peters had once visited St. Louis, and knew what a large city was.

"Oh, I think I shall try and take it along," said Tom. "A fellow never knows how much he wants to blow in when he goes to a place. Things may be more expensive in New York than they are in Texas."

"Expensive!" cried Peters. "Why, you could buy half the town for three thousand dollars. Do you know anybody in New York?"

"No one but Billy Smith; he went there a while ago, and I haven't heard from him for three years, but I'll just inquire around till I find him. Somebody there will be sure to know him. Billy was always hard up, and I can perhaps help him out a bit."

"If you don't know his address," said Peters, with the caution of a man who has traveled as far as St. Louis and spent a week in that city, "you may have some trouble in finding him."

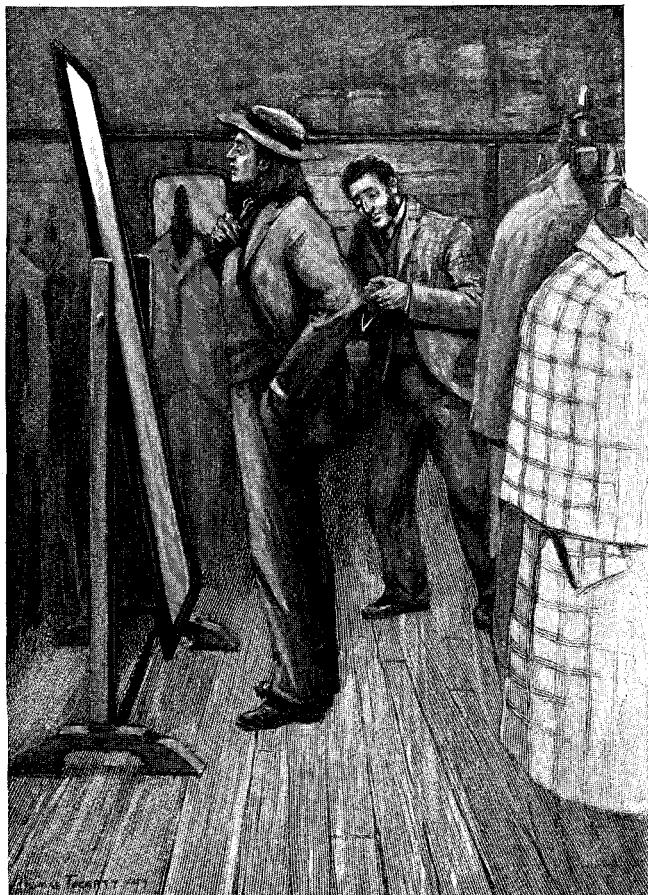
"Oh, I guess not," said Tom. "I know pretty near everybody in Texas, and Texas is a good deal bigger than New York, from what I've heard."

"Well, maybe, maybe," grudgingly admitted Peters, "but they're different, you know."

"What I wanted to find out," said Tom, "is what does it cost to go from here to New York. What's the price of a ticket?"

Peters scratched his head doubtfully.

"It takes a good bit of money," he said. "I don't know exactly how much. I couldn't sell you a ticket any farther than St. Louis, and then you'd have to get



"... AND BOUGHT WHAT WAS NEEDED TO MAKE HIM APPEAR AS A RESIDENT OF THE CITY."

were all glad enough to get our board and something to drink now and then from him. But these last two or three years, since the panic, he's making money hand over fist, and last week he paid me up—owed me \$3,200, and I got every cent of it."

"You don't say?" replied Peters. "Well, Chapman always was a white man."

another there. But say, Tom, couldn't you get a letter from old man Chapman setting out that you are going East on cattle business? If he can do that, I'll send it on to headquarters, and I'm not sure but we can get you a pass right through. You see Chapman ships a lot of cattle over this line, and he has never been anywhere, and the big ranchmen always get transportation over the road when they want to go east or west. Of course it isn't any of my business to knock down the receipts of the railway company, but still I've known you for five years, and although I'm not sure I can work it, I think I can. I'm dead certain I can get you a pass from here to St. Louis anyhow, and if Chapman sends the right sort of a letter, I shouldn't wonder but the folks at headquarters can fix you clear to New York and back, and never cost you a cent."

"Geewhillicans!" cried Tom, who never had an idea that anybody traveled on a railway without paying his fare.

"How soon are you going?" asked Peters.

"Oh, I'm not particular for a week or two."

"Very well! Now you get me that letter from Chapman. Tell him to put it strong. He can say that nobody's ever had transportation from his ranch and that he's shipped thousands of cattle through on this line, and I'll see what I can do."

"Well," said Tom gratefully, "you are a white man, Peters. I'll bring the letter in to-morrow."

And so, each taking another pull at the bottle, they parted.

Next day Peters sent on to headquarters the request of Chapman, and in a day or two he got a letter of inquiry from some one in authority, which he answered enthusiastically. A week later the documents came, all pinned together, and Tom started East with the proud consciousness that he didn't need to pay a cent, unless he took a sleeping-car, until he entered the city of New York.

It was an amazing journey, and Tom found that it exceeded his wildest expectations. He made the mistake for a whole day of thinking that Jersey City was New York, and he wandered round and was much stared at; they thought that Buffalo Bill and his company had arrived in town once more. He reached Jersey City in the morning, and towards four o'clock, after spending his admiration on it, discovered

that New York was on the other side of the river. He went across, and found for himself a reasonably modest hotel, where he was expected to pay two dollars a day for room and food. He expected to be swindled right and left, but, to his surprise, everything was very reasonable, and no one attempted to take any advantage of him, although he had his suspicions of the ready-made clothing man from whom he bought a complete outfit, for Tom was a shrewd fellow, and realized that his costume was not quite the same as those of the regular citizens of New York; so he went to the ready-made clothing store and bought what was needed to make him appear as a resident of the city, even to shirts, neck-tie, and linen collar, which he had to be measured for, never having worn one before.

The clothing-store man told Tom that he would send the things to his hotel, but Tom, casting one suspicious glance at him, resolved not to be "done" in that simple fashion, and, taking the bundle under his arm, carried it to his hotel himself. Tom told the clerk of the hotel, with whom he had established confidential relations, of this attempt on the part of the clothing-store man to swindle him, and was amazed when the clerk informed him that it would very likely have been all right. And thus Tom's suspicions of the great city began to disappear, and he found that this world was not nearly as bad as some people represented.

When fitted out in his new suit Tom hardly recognized himself. He felt very uncomfortable, but had the satisfaction of knowing that he looked exactly like every other citizen in the metropolis, except as far as his hair was concerned. His hair was light, almost of a golden color, and, like that of the girl in the song, it hung down his shoulders. Resolved to make his sacrifice to fashion complete, he entered a hair-cutting establishment and demanded to be closely shorn. The barber stood back and looked at him with admiration. "It's a pity," he said, "to put shears into anything like that. I never saw anything to compare with it since Paderewski was here, and his stuck up on end more than yours does."

"That's all right," said Tom. "I don't want people turning round to stare after me as I pass along. You give me a close cut." And in a very short time Tom's luxuriant auburn tresses lay scattered on the barber's floor, and he left the place with a sigh of relief to think there was

now no distinguishing marks of Texas about him. He made diligent inquiries for his friend Billy Smith, and was disappointed when he could find no one who knew him. When he spoke to the hotel clerk about it, that alert young man, who he supposed knew everything, said at once he would find him if he was in New York, and he turned to the bulky directory of the city and looked up the Smiths, and, just as he predicted, he found several hundred of them; so he advised Tom that the only thing he could do was to call on each one of them and discover the real Billy Smith, a task, the clerk estimated, that would occupy Tom, if he gave it close attention, for about a year. The cowboy, with a sigh, gave up the attempt, and grew more and more lonely in the big city.

One day as he passed down Broadway a man accosted him:

"Hallo!" he said. "Is this you, John?"

"No," said Tom, "I'm not John; my name's Tom Stover."

"Well," said the other, with an air of disappointment, "I could have sworn that you were John Bloomingdale from Buggin's Corners, New York."

"No," answered Tom, with a regretful sigh, for he would have been only too glad to meet some one he knew. "I'm not from York State at all. The fact is that I come from the West. My name's Tom Stover, and I worked for five years on Chapman's ranch in Texas. Only came to New York the other day. Never been here before."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the man.

"I took you for another fellow altogether. Good-by!"

"Good-by," said Tom, and he stood on the crowded edge of the pavement watching the retreating figure of the man who might perhaps have known him; but better luck was in store for him. He had hardly gone a hundred yards down the street when a stranger, looking keenly at him, placed his hands on Tom's shoulders.

"Thunder and lightning!" said the stranger, "if you're not Tom Stover, you're the dead image of him."

Tom's face lighted up.

"You're dead right," he said, "but how the deuce you come to know me now that I got my hair cut, I can't imagine."

"Know you?" cried the other, "why I'd know you anywhere, hair cut or no hair cut. Weren't you on Chapman's ranch in Texas something like five years ago?"

"You bet!" cried Tom, with keen delight. "Why, were you out there?"

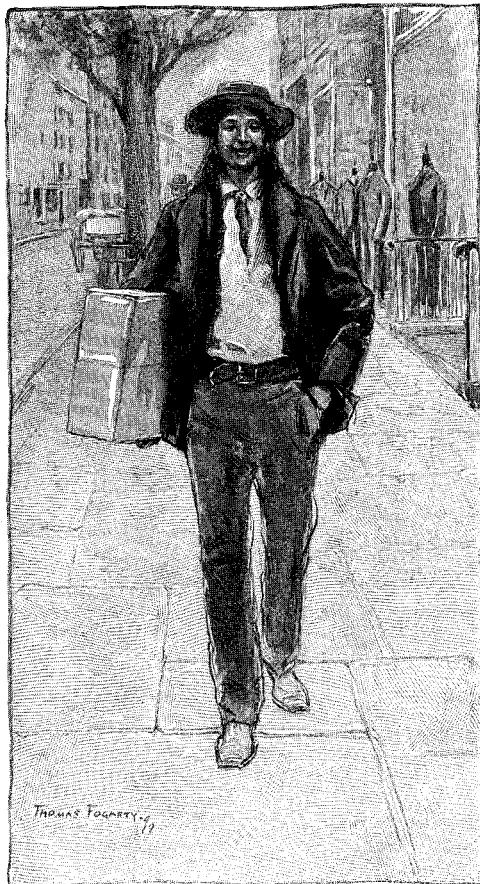
"Certain," cried the man. "My name's Smithers. I don't suppose you recollect me. I was going through Texas to the gold fields. I'm a miner, I am, and don't know New York at all; only came here about a week ago."

"Same with me," cried Tom, smiting his big right hand down on the other's palm and shaking his arm vigorously. "Same with me. I've just come through from Texas. First time I've ever been in New York."

"Is that so?" cried Smithers. "Come on and let's have something to drink."

"You bet!" said Tom, taking him by the arm.

Smithers had a smooth-shaven face,



" . . . TAKING THE BUNDLE UNDER HIS ARM, CARRIED IT TO HIS HOTEL HIMSELF."

and a quick furtive look in his eye which seemed to rove all about him, with frequent glances to the rear. He drew Tom down a side street, and then turning a corner with apparently more knowledge of New York than a man who had just landed there should have, he pushed open the swinging door of a saloon, and they entered. They found a secluded corner, and sat down at a table.

Smithers said, "What will you have?"

"No, no," cried Tom, "this is my treat," and he pulled out a bundle of paper money from his pocket that made the other's eyes glisten. "It's strange," said Tom, "that you should have remembered me right here in New York after not seeing me for five years, while I can't remember you at all. I suppose you only stayed at the ranch a night or so?"

"Yes," said Smithers, "that was all, but I never forget a man when I once take to him; and besides, you weren't long there, I think you told me at the time."

"No; that is so. I was a newcomer then, and I guess that accounts for it. Still, we never had many visitors at the ranch, so I can't think how it is I don't remember you. You must have a wonderful memory to recognize not only my face but remember my name as well."

"I must admit," said Smithers, "I have, and, as I told you, I never forget a man I once take to. Are you going back soon?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I expect to. I came with \$3,200 dollars in my pocket—"

"What, and spent it all already?" asked the other in alarm.

Tom laughed boisterously, and said, "No, I've only spent a little on new clothes and a few other things. I keep my cash right here," added Tom, tapping the inside breast pocket of his coat.

"Yes," said Smithers, with a sigh, "that's the best place to keep it. I wish I had my money in my inside pocket."

"And haven't you?" asked Tom.

"No. You see, as I told you, I went through to the mines, and for three or four years had a hard time of it, but at last I struck it rich. I struck a nugget that is worth a hundred thousand dollars if it's worth a cent."

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed Tom, with wide-open eyes.

"Yes, sir, and I brought that nugget with me right here to New York. I had no ready money, and I had to put it in pawn. It isn't a thing you can sell off-hand, right in a minute. A man has got it, and he gives me a hundred dollars now,

and fifty dollars another time, and so on. He says I owe him three thousand dollars, but I don't, and he refuses to give it up unless I pay him three thousand dollars. Of course I haven't the money, and I can't get it until I get a hold of that nugget. Now I know how to sell it, and could get my hundred thousand dollars for it in ten minutes if I once had hold of the gold. But he won't let it go. He expects I'll be knocked on the head, I suppose, then he'll own it."

"Jumping bunco!" cried Tom, bringing his fist down on the table. "Tell me who the man is, and I'll blow the top of his head off. I'll fill him with lead."

"No, no," said the other. "That won't do here in New York, you know. You could have done that in a mining camp right enough, but it won't do in the East. No, I must have the money or I can't get that lump of gold."

"How much money did you say you needed?" cried Tom.

"I need three thousand dollars cash, and if any man would let me have that for about half an hour, till I could get my lump of gold changed into bills, I'd willingly give five thousand for the accommodation of the money."

"George Washington!" cried Tom. "What are you talking about? Don't you know I've got the three thousand dollars? Why, bless my soul, let's go and get that lump of gold out at once."

"Well," demurred the other, "you're a stranger to me, you know; I couldn't ask you for the money, only knowing you half an hour."

"You've known me five years," said Tom, rising. "You come along with me, and show me where this man is, and I'll fork over the three thousand dollars. I've got it right here with me."

The other still demurred, and seemed to hesitate.

"Well," he said, "I'll do it on one condition, that you take the lump of gold yourself and get the cash for it."

"You'll do it," said Tom enthusiastically, "on no conditions at all. You take the money and get your gold, and bring me back the money to the Sellers House; you know where that hotel is, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Smithers, "I know it very well," and he took out a note-book and put down the name. "Very well, then," he said. "To-morrow I will bring back your money, and we'll go out and have dinner together."

"You bet!" cried Tom, delighted to

think he had overcome the scruples of the other.

Smithers led the cowboy down one street and up another, and at last they came to a dark passage, and went up three flights of stairs, where he pushed open the door of a shabby room and they found a man sitting beside an ordinary wooden table of the roughest sort.

"I say!" cried Smithers, "have you got that piece of gold of mine?"

"Yes," said the other, grumbly, "if you've got the money to pay me what you owe."

"I got the money," replied Smithers bitterly; "at least I've got a friend here who'll put up the money, and I guess that's the same thing."

"Yes," cried Tom, "and you may be plagued glad that you're not out in Texas, where you'd get your cursed head blown off."

The man in the room looked in alarm at the huge figure of Tom, and as he did so, Tom seemed to recognize him, but could not think where he had met him. The man rose hastily and went to a cupboard, and brought out a huge lump of yellow metal.

"There it is," he said, placing the metal on the table.

Tom pulled out his long leather pocket-book from his inside pocket, and counted out the three thousand dollars. The other, rolling it up in a bundle, thrust it in his trousers pocket, and pushed the lump of gold towards the cowboy.

"There," said Smithers, "you take that as security."

"Security be hanged," cried Tom with indignation. "You drop round at my hotel to-morrow. Come about four o'clock, and I'll stay in for you."

"Very well," said Smithers, shaking him warmly by the hand. "I'll take this now and get my money for it."

Tom went down the stairs alone, and the two men looked at each other with a grin.

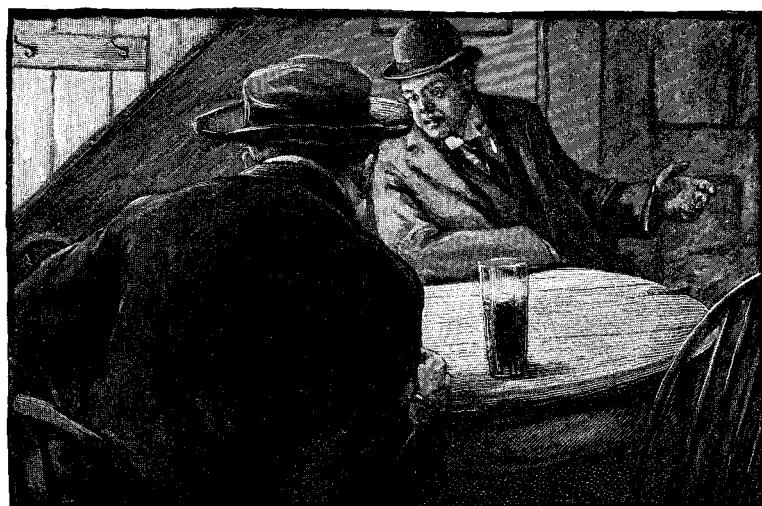
"I'll be hanged," said Smithers, "if it isn't too disgustingly easy."

"Oh," said the other man, "he'll soon meet some one who will put him on to the game, so we'd better close up this establishment as quickly as possible, and get away." Which they accordingly did.

Only once did suspicion cross the mind of Tom Stover. As he was walking up Broadway it suddenly came to him that the man in the room was the same who had accosted him and asked if he were not John Bloomingdale. He wondered at the coincidence, because he had been much struck within the past day or two with the size of New York and the impossibility of meeting any one a person knew.

Four o'clock next day arrived, but no Smithers came with it. It was late that evening when Tom confided the situation to the hotel clerk. After waiting till six o'clock, he had roamed about the city trying to find the room to which Smithers had taken him, but he could not even find the saloon where they had first drank together. It was late at night when he returned, and, ashamed of himself for harboring unworthy suspicions, he hesitatingly told the clerk what had happened to him. The clerk looked at him with unfeigned amazement.

"Well," he said, "if I had had any idea that you were so green as that I would have put you on your guard. It never struck me that you would be taken in by the first gold-brick man you met on the streets. You've been buncoed. How much money did they get out of you?"



"I MUST HAVE THE MONEY OR I CAN'T GET THAT LUMP OF GOLD."

"Three thousand dollars," said Tom, with a sigh.

"Have you got any left?" asked the clerk sharply, thinking of the hotel bill.

"I've got a little over a hundred dollars," replied Tom.

"Well," said the clerk, a little more cordially, "you take my advice and get right back to Texas. Have you got your ticket?"

"Yes."

"Very well then, a hundred dollars will see you through. New York's not your size. I didn't think there was a man in this country from one end to the other that

"Well," said Peters, as Tom stepped from the train, "what kind of a time did you have? Back sooner than you expected, aren't you?"

"Yes, a little sooner," replied Tom. "Oh, I had a great time. Big city, New York."

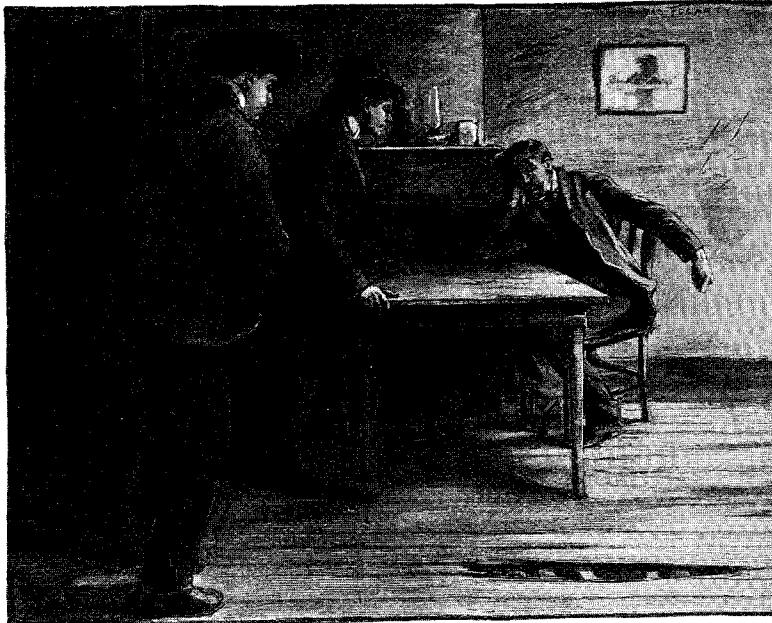
"I suppose it is," said Peters. "How much of the three thousand dollars did you bring back with you?"

"Oh, I've got a ten-dollar bill or so, and some change in silver."

"Geewhillicans!" cried Peters in astonishment. "Blew in the whole three thousand, every cent of it? You *have* had a time. You didn't buy the town and give it away, did you?"

"No, but I gave myself away once or twice. But it's all in a lifetime, and I've had the worth of the money, I guess. A fellow must have a fling some time, you know, Peters."

"Yes, I know," said Peters, rubbing his chin meditatively and wrinkling his brows. "But, Tom, think how many bottles of whisky



"'I SAY!' CRIED SMITHERS, 'HAVE YOU GOT THAT PIECE OF GOLD OF MINE?'"

hadn't read about these bunco-steerers and the way they work. Why, the game's been given away again and again in every newspaper in the land."

"Yes," said Tom dolefully, "but I've been living on a ranch, and I don't read newspapers."

"All right," said the clerk, "but the lesson has cost you three thousand dollars; so if I were you I'd subscribe for a paper. I don't suppose you'll ever see a cent of that money again. I'll tell the police, but it won't be any use; these fellows are too sharp."

The police were told, but as the clerk had predicted, it was no use. For two or three days Tom wandered up and down the street hoping to meet Smithers or his confederate, but that too proved useless.

that money would have bought!"

"Yes," said Tom, with the ghost of a sigh, "it would have gone a long way in old rye."

"Well," said Peters, "I suppose if you're satisfied, nobody else has a right to grumble. But three thousand dollars in less than that number of weeks, I couldn't have believed it!"

"It isn't all wasted," said Tom, "because I've got a case here that's for you, and in it are twelve bottles of as good whisky as you ever put your lips to. I don't forget my old friends merely because I'm having a high old time in New York by myself."

"You're a brick," said Peters gratefully, shaking him warmly by the hand, and, as the rear car of the westward train

was now dim in the distance, Tom opened the case, and Peters opened a bottle.

Tom's adventures in New York were for many days the wonder of Chapman's ranch. He wasn't a man of much imagination, and was sometimes hard put to it when the cowboys pressed for details of the fun which involved such enormous expenditure in so short a time. The general opinion was that Tom must have lived high and gone the pace in order to get through so much money. Even old Chapman himself shook his head and doubted whether a man in a couple of weeks could have all the fun which such a sum represented. However, Tom put on no airs over his comrades; he was as genial as ever, and continued to be as well liked as he always had been. His yellow hair grew down to his shoulders once more, and if there was a pleasant swagger in his manner, that was merely to be expected from a man who had had such a wild time in the metropolis for two weeks. The New York affair also had another effect: Tom now subscribed for a New York paper, and read it assiduously, as did also most of the other boys in the camp. The numbers accumulated in bundles at the railway station, and were forwarded by Peters every time any one went out from the ranch to Chapman's Junction. It was generally supposed that Tom in his two weeks had become so addicted to the frivolities of New York society that he must now read of those balls and theater parties which he could no longer attend.

"I see your friend Mrs. Vandergould has given another great dance," old man Chapman would say as he read the paper. "Here's a whole column of people who attended it. I suppose you met most of these folks while you were down at New York?"

"Couldn't help meeting 'em," said Tom. "Of course they were very nice to me, and naturally I had to give a blow-out or two in return. I couldn't have 'em think a fellow coming from Chapman's ranch in Texas was mean with the money."

"No," said old Chapman proudly, "you did it up fine, Tom, even if it did cost you three thousand dollars. I guess they know by this time that there's no flies on Texas."

"You bet!" said Tom. And so it was felt that, all in all, Tom had done credit to the locality during his brief sojourn in New York. But all the while Tom was saving up his money and carefully reading the criminal columns in the paper he sub-

scribed for. He knew that such a man as Smithers was bound to be arrested sooner or later, and he expected to read his description when the police took him in, and probably see a picture of him on the front page of the paper. The journal he took dealt very fully with criminal matters; in fact it was his friend the hotel clerk who had advised what paper to take in, if he wanted to keep up with the police news of the big city.

At last Tom's vigilance was rewarded. The moment he opened the paper and saw the portrait of a man's smooth, cynical face, he recognized Smithers. He also, though less certainly, recognized the man who was his comrade. Other pictures were given, also a view of a house, also a picture of a man bound and gagged, also a picture of the same man as he appeared to the ordinary citizen. It had been a big affair: not a bunco game this time, but a fair and square robbery. The man had stepped into his carriage at the bank door, with over sixty thousand dollars in the valise he carried in his hand. The man thought everything was right, but Smithers was sitting in the driver's seat, for the driver had been inveigled away by a false message from his master. The trick had been cleverly done. In a certain narrow street the carriage stopped; Smithers's confederate stepped in and promptly knocked the man on the head. He was then bound and gagged and carried into a house these two had rented. There he was left, tied up in a hard knot, while Smithers drove his confederate to the Cunard docks. When they reached the docks, Smithers engaged some one to mind his horse until he returned. They divided the money, thirty thousand dollars each, and the confederate got on the steamer and sailed away, while Smithers crossed the ferry and made for the boundless West, each man carrying out his idea of the surest method of escape.

Smithers, whose real name appeared to be Brownlow, had been traced as far as St. Louis. The Cunard steamer was speeding across the Atlantic, but a cable despatch was awaiting the confederate at Queenstown, and there the authorities had every hope of arresting him.

When Tom had read thus far in the first day's paper he eagerly turned to the next. The thieves had had a good opportunity of getting away, for it was a day before the rich man was found in the deserted house, still alive and intensely anxious. The next day's papers told of the rich man's offer of five thousand dollars for

the capture of either one of his assailants, and gave the further news that Smithers had been arrested at a town a hundred miles or so west of St. Louis. Tom at once made up his mind to go there. He was firmly resolved to have one shot at Smithers, even if he spent the remainder of his life in jail for doing so. He told old man Chapman that he would like a holiday for a week or two, and wanted a few hundred dollars if the old man would advance him so much. Old Chapman asked no questions, but gave him the money, and Tom got on his horse and rode towards Chapman's Junction, where he took a ticket for the town in which Smithers had been arrested. But a surprise awaited him there; Smithers, in some unaccountable way, had escaped. It was known, of course, that Smithers was in ample funds, and those who arrested him were now highly indignant because they were charged with accepting a bribe. The man, they said, was desperate and well armed. He had pulled a revolver on them and held them up while he escaped. It was known that he had taken the train for Texas, but all trace of him was now lost. The men, for some inexplicable reason, had neglected to give the alarm as promptly as they might have done, and once more Smithers had a fair chance of getting into Mexico before an officer could put his hand on his shoulder and arrest him in the name of the law. Detectives from New York were coming, but Smithers had a long start of them. Tom cursed the luck that had allowed his prey to escape, but promptly took train over the ground Smithers had traveled. He knew enough of the lay of the country to be well aware that Smithers, if he were at all informed, would leave the railway, buy a horse, and ride over the Mexican border. Tom paid his fare from station to station in a way that made the conductor think there was something wrong with his passenger's head. Every time the train stopped Tom got off, seized the station master by the shoulder, and rapidly asked him if anybody answering the description of the fugitive had got off the train within a day or two, bought a horse, and started for the interior. The reply was "no" for some hundreds of miles, and Tom swung on the train, sometimes just as it was pulling out, paid his fare to the next station, where he repeated his questioning. At last he met the reward that always awaits the patient and persistent.

"Yes," said the station agent, "he

bought a horse from old Seppings. He evidently didn't know anything about a horse, because Seppings palmed off on him the oldest and poorest horse he had on his ranch and made the man pay the biggest price for it. I guess he'd lots of money, so it doesn't matter. He didn't haggle about the price at all. He said he was going to the north, but in that he lied, because, after starting north and thinking he'd got out of sight, he changed his course and went straight south."

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?" asked Tom.

"Oh, a middle-sized man, and looked like he came from the city. He had a stubbly beard that seemed as if he hadn't shaved for two or three days. I guess generally he's a smooth-shaver, that man; a keen-looking fellow. He said he was prospecting, wanted to buy a ranch, or something of that sort."

"That's my man. Where's Seppings's place? I want to buy a horse and follow him."

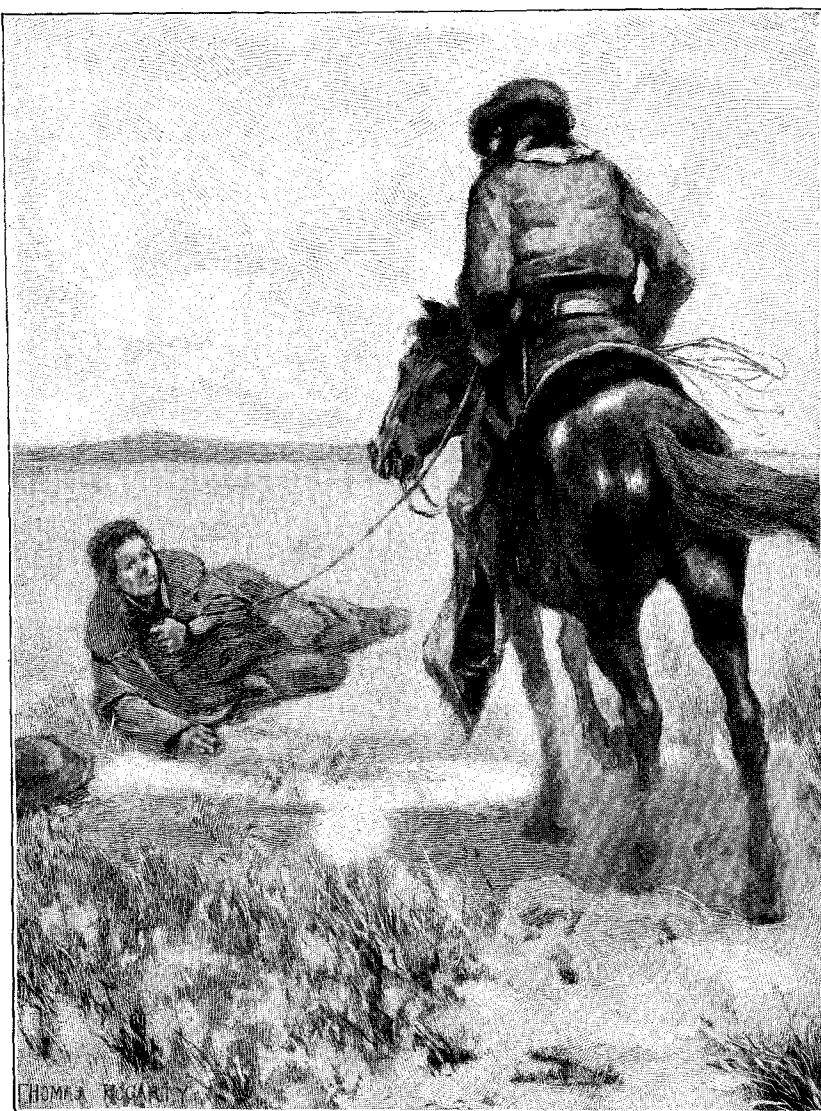
Seppings found Tom not such easy game as Smithers had been. Tom knew a horse when he saw one, and knew what its price was, too; but when old Seppings learned in the course of conversation that Tom had come from Chapman's ranch and was one of the boys himself, he wouldn't take a penny for the horse, but told him to select one for himself, and give it back when he was through with the chase. The other man had a day's start; but Tom knew he would speedily overtake him when he got on the trail. He put spurs to his horse, and on the second day out from Seppings's ranch he saw a dot on the sky line that he knew to be Smithers. It was nearly noon when he overtook him.

"Hallo, comrade!" he shouted. "Where are you bound for?"

The other, who had been urging on his horse as fast as he could for an hour before, seemed relieved at the cheery tones of the man who had overtaken him, and answered:

"Oh, I'm prospecting. Just looking round the country. I'm thinking of buying a ranch and settling down here."

"Well, that's a good plan," said Tom, spurring up beside him. "You'll find it very healthy, and lots of fun too, although you mightn't think it. I've seen more excitement in Texas in ten minutes than I've seen anywhere else in my whole life. You'll find the people all nice and neighborly, always ready to help a fellow-



HOMER RIGGINS

"I TOLD YOU YOU COULD HAVE A LOT OF FUN IN TEXAS, AND IT'S JUST BEGINNING"

creature when he's in trouble. Oh, you'll like the people. I'm a miner myself. I've just come from Colorado, and I've got a nugget of gold that's worth a hundred thousand dollars if it's worth a cent, and I'll tell you what it is, friend, I need three thousand dollars to get it out of a fellow's clutches. He's been lending me money, and I thought perhaps if you were looking for a ranch you might have the money on your clothes somewhere, and help a fellow out without any trouble, don't you see?"

Smithers looked sharply at Tom; then it occurred to him that it perhaps would be better to escape; so he whipped up his

jaded horse and tried to worry a gallop out of him, which made Tom laugh when he thought of the futility of the move. He made no attempt to overtake him, but leisurely unwound the lariat from his waist. Then urging his horse forward, Tom airily swung the looped rope above his head, and dropped it gently over the body of Smithers. At a word Tom's horse stopped dead, bracing his feet in the turf. The rope tightened, and the unfortunate Smithers was dragged out of his saddle to the ground. The tired horse looked round and stopped, when the burden had been so promptly removed from his back.

"There," said Tom, riding up. "You

shouldn't leave an old acquaintance so suddenly as that, you know. I told you you could have a lot of fun in Texas, and it's just beginning. Stay with us and be friends."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Smithers, getting up and limping round between groans. His sudden fall had shaken him.

"Do with you?" cried Tom. "I'm going to have a lot of fun with you before I get through. How much have you got left of that thirty thousand dollars?"

"Not much," said Smithers dolefully. "I had to pay away most of it to those men who let me off. They just let me keep enough to see me into Mexico."

"Quite so," said Tom. "Well, we will test that statement. First, I'll see how much you've got in this bag."

Tom sprang off his horse, and opened the valise. It was about half full of currency notes, but they were all of small denominations. He turned them over with his hand, and at the same time a shot rang out in the still air.

"Oh, you've got a pistol, have you?" said Tom, looking up and seemingly quite interested in the fact. "I didn't search you, because I knew you New-Yorkers couldn't hit anything even if you tried; but I'll show you what shooting is." So pulling his revolver, Tom shot twice in quick succession, and Smithers felt a sharp pain in one ear and then in the other. He dropped his own pistol with a scream, and put his hands up to his head. When he took them down the blood was upon his palms.

"There," said Tom, "if you ever want to wear earrings you won't have to punch any holes. Of course you see that your life's safe with me, for I could as easily have put one shot through you as those two through your ears."

Tom walked to him, and picked up the pistol, which lay on the ground.

"Have you got another gun with you?"

"No," groaned Smithers.

Tom lightly felt over his person, then said to him: "Sit down over there. Now, if you move till I'm through counting this money I'll break your right leg and take you to the railway in front of my saddle, or if you give me too much trouble, I'll kill you right here and leave you. So if you want to get comfortably back to civilization, sit there and keep quiet."

Tom counted the money, and found under the heap of small bills some of much larger denomination, and in all there was something like four thousand dollars in the hand-bag.

"Now, Smithers," said Tom in his most serious manner, "where's the rest of this money?"

"I gave it all away, as I told you, to those fellows that let me go."

"I don't believe that. Take off your coat; I'm going to search you." Smithers reluctantly removed his coat, and tearing the lining Tom found it padded with greenbacks.

"Ah, ha," he said with satisfaction.

"This is more like the thing. I'm afraid I'm going to spoil this coat, Smithers; but I guess the government will get you another, so don't you worry."

Tom sat there counting for a long time, and was not sure he had the amount correct at last, but he made it something like twenty-seven thousand dollars. He stuffed the greenbacks into the valise.

"Now, Smithers," he said, with a sigh of satisfaction, "get on your little horse, and we'll jog along back."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the trembling man for the second time. The blood was running down from his ears along his neck.

"Well, in the first place," said Tom, "I'm going to take the five thousand dollars that the New-Yorker offers as a reward for the recovery of the rest of the money. I'll send the remainder of the cash on to him by express from my station when I get there. As for you, I'll hand you over to the sheriff, or whoever is best qualified to take hold of you; then they can do what they like with you."

"But you've got no right to arrest me without a warrant," said Smithers.

"Oh, we don't bother about such trifles as warrants here in Texas. Don't you worry about that; you can make a complaint about it if you like. I think they will do everything for you that is strictly legal, in order to satisfy you, when they get you down in St. Louis or New York. I've got some salt in my pocket, which I always carry for the benefit of my horse, so let me rub a handful into those ears of yours. It will sting at first, but it will be good for 'em."

They got on their horses, and made their way back to Seppings's ranch. On the train Smithers appealed to the passengers, saying that he was being held without a warrant, and the conductor seemed to think the transaction somewhat illegal. But Tom explained to all those in the smoking-car that they were in the State of Texas, that he had two first-class active revolvers in his possession, and that if

anybody wanted to test his marksmanship, as Smithers had done, they'd only to step up and try to rescue the prisoner. So the passengers agreed not to interfere with what was strictly none of their business.

At Chapman's Junction Tom took his prisoner by the collar and lugged him off, keeping a threatening eye on the passengers as he did so.

"See here, Peters," he said, as the train was moving off, "these people on the train seem to think you must have a warrant to arrest a thief. Is that so, Peters?"

Peters stood there rubbing his chin thoughtfully, regarding the prisoner intently the while.

"Well, I guess that's so, Tom," he said, after a while. "You can't arrest a man in this country, thief or murderer, you know, without a warrant."

"You don't mean it?" cried Tom, much abashed.

"Yes," replied Peters, "we must do things according to law and order."

"That's right," said Smithers. "I told this man so, all along."

"Well, you mustn't mind him," said Peters to the stranger. "Tom's a good fellow, but he can't be expected to be a lawyer, you know. We'll do everything here legal and proper, and don't you be afraid. We'll tie you up in a hard knot, and telegraph to St. Louis, and say we're sitting on you till they come; and then, you bet, you'll have all the warrants you want. So don't you be dissatisfied, and don't you hold it against Tom."

When the officers at length arrived they made no objections to Tom's breach of the law in making his revolver his warrant for the arrest of the prisoner.

"Good-by!" said Tom, holding out his hand to Smithers, which the other curtly refused, "and remember this whenever you are doing your time, wherever it is, that if you hadn't taken in a fellow who was kind-hearted, if he was green, you'd have got off this time into Mexico."